DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 199 FL 021 773

AUTHOR Robb, Thomas; Tillyer, Anthea
TITLE Electronically Yours: Cross-Cultural Communication through E-Mail Penpals.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 4p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (Atlanta, GA, April 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Electronic Classrooms; *Electronic Mail; Intercultural Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Pen Pals

ABSTRACT

This paper offers advice to instructors for arranging cross-cultural communication through electronic e-mail. After acquiring user identifications, checking the reliability of the equipment, and finding an electronic penpal class, teachers should communicate their goals and requirements to each other and pair students together. Teachers can then teach students to send, print, save, download, and upload messages. Helpful hints for successful electronic exchanges, and for possible e-mail activities are offered. Ways that teachers can make the process easier for students are also described. Information on obtaining a penpal class is given. (JP)

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ELECTRONICALLY YOURS: CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH E-MAIL PENPALS by THOMAS ROBB and ANTHEA TILLYER

ED 366 199

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Electronically yours: Cross-cultural communication through e-mail penpals

Thomas Robb, Kyoto Sangyo University
trobb@ksuics.kyoto-su.ac.jp
Anthea Tillyer, City University of New York
abthc@cunyvm.bitnet

Things you need even before the class meets for the first time

1. Electronic mail user IDs for yourself and your students.
2. Some knowledge of electronic mail techniques.
3. Reliable equipment with communications capability
4. A decision on whether you want native-speaker, ESL, or EFL penpals.
5. A penpal class to correspond with. You can get one by joining TESL-L and its CALL/Computer Branch TESLCA-L. See "JOINING TESL-L" at the end of the handout.)

Things you should do before the class meets

1. Make sure both you and the other teacher have clear goals in mind and that each of you knows the goals of the other. The teachers do not need to have the same goals for their classes; but they do need to know each other's goals.
2. Decide what requirements (in terms of length, frequency etc.) each of you is going to have, who is going to monitor them, and how.
3. Decide whether this will be an in-class activity or a homework assignment.
4. Pair up the students in your respective classes before the course starts (circulate the complete list to the students on the first day of class).
5. Give each student multiple penpals. That way if one penpal falls by the wayside, the student still has another.
6. Decide to what extent you want to monitor the students' messages and help with the English in them. And, of course, inform your students of your decision.
7. Prepare a thorough handout explaining the various steps for logging on, creating and sending a message. See "MAKING IT EASIER FOR THEM" below.
8. Arrange for some assistants for the first class or two. You can't be at twenty terminals at once when they all shout for help!

Do teach your students how to

1. send messages to each other as a first step
2. cc. you, at least at first.
3. cc. themselves.
4. forward their penpal's messages to you, if they want to.
5. print out messages that they receive.
6. "download" the messages they receive
7. prepare, save, and upload messages they want to send from a PC.

Things to beware of

1. Do not embark on an email relationship with another teacher without first ascertaining that the teacher reliably responds to messages.
2. Do not expect your students to pick this up right away, nor to understand what you are talking about when you introduce the concept of electronic mail.

Hints

1. Students LOVE it when they find a message waiting for them the first time they log on to the system! It really motivates them to try for more. If the other school starts its semester before yours does, you're in luck because they will start to write first! Otherwise, try sending a mass mailing to the whole class yourself so that you can be confident that there is something waiting for them in their electronic mailbox.

2. Encourage your students to send a short reply immediately upon receiving a message even if they can't reply in full right away. The students on the other end are usually anxious to know if their message has arrived, too.
3. Students should know the goals, type, and teacher's name of their penpal class. They should also know whether their penpals are being graded on this activity or not.
4. Students staring at computer monitors are functionally deaf. If you want give instructions to the whole class, have them turn down the contrast on their monitors and THEN speak

Possible e-mail activities

1. It is often very successful if two classes read the same book or watch the same video and then "discuss" it electronically.
2. Students really enjoy sending teachers email messages and getting messages back. Electronic "drop-in" office hours have helped many students build up both English language skills and a good relation ship with their teacher

Making it easier for them

1. Make macros of your terminal program to make the logging in and signing off as easy as possible.
2. Give them screen shots of each step of the process.
3. Break it down into easy steps, so that at each step of the way they know what sort of result/confirmation to expect as a result of their input.
4. Include instructions for what to do when it DOESN'T work right -- Is there an easy way to get back to Step One and start all over?
5. Try your instructions on one or two students BEFORE duplicating your info to see what glitches arise. There will surely be some!!

Joining TESL-L

Anyone with an Internet or Bitnet e-mail address (or a valid account on any commercial service linked to the Internet) can participate in TESL-L.

Send a message to LISTSERV at the appropriate address:

Bitnet: LISTSERV@CUNYVM.BITNET
Internet: LISTSERV@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU

Leave the subject line blank (It's ignored)

For the body of the message say:

SUBscribe TESL-L your-full-name-here

Example: SUB TESL-L Bill Clinton

To join TESLCA-L, follow the same process as above, but using "TESLCA-L"

SUBscribe TESLCA-L your-full-name-here

TESL-L Branch List

CALL/Computer	TESLCA-L
Fluency First and Whole Language	TESLFF-L
Intercultural Communication	TESLIC-L
Intensive English Programs	TESLIE-L
Jobs & Employment Issues	TESLJB-L
Literacy and Adult Education	TESLFF-L
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